W THE LACONIA SANK
and
E MILITIA MOBILIZATION
N THE MEXICAN BORDER

O MASTERPIECES OF REPORTING
by
FLOYD P. GIBBONS

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HOW THE LACONIA SANK: *The* MILITIA MOBILIZATION ON THE MEXICAN BORDER

Two masterpieces of reporting
by

FLOYD P. GIBBONS

London correspondent of the Chicago Tribune, a survivor of the Laconia disaster; Special War Correspondent with the U.S. Army in Mexico.

Introduction by
ROBERT R. McCORMICK
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INTRODUCTION

THE German announcement of an unrestricted submarine campaign followed by the breaking off of diplomatic relations by our government gave to London a renewed value as a source of news.

The American public immediately became interested to learn how England would meet the submarine measure and, anticipating hostilities with Germany, to learn what unprepared, loosely governed England has done to equip herself for war.

During the course of the war The Tribune has made many efforts to obtain interesting news from England but, due to the censorship and the deadening effect of London association upon American newspaper men, its own correspondents had been as unsuccessful as the correspondents of other newspapers.

We chose for our final attempt one of our star local reporters, Floyd P. Gibbons. Mr. Gibbons has added to a wide experience in local reporting, a series of adventures in Mexico with Villa, the expedition to Colonia Dublan with Pershing, and a critical study of the militia mobilization in Texas.

In order to safeguard his voyage over we suggested that he should travel with Ambassador von Bernstorff on

the *Frederick VII* or should go to France via Spain. It was his own idea to cross the submarine zone and with the expectation of being submarined on the way. For this contingency he was clothed and equipped with a special life-preserver, a large fresh-water bottle, electric flashlights, and a flask of brandy.

Mr. Gibbons' expectation was realized. His account of the sinking of his ship, the *Laconia,* is one of the great feats of reporting in the history of journalism.

The proximity of the war with Germany makes military training the greatest question before the nation. In a country where the army does not and cannot rule, the public must supply the will for adequate methods.

In order to supply the proper pressure the public must understand how well we are prepared, not only in material but *in leadership,* to create a great army.

Information is available upon this point, obtained from the experience of our mobilization in Texas last summer, but it has been very generally suppressed.

Through a mistaken idea of patriotism and through fear of threatened censorship most newspaper correspondents refrained from publishing the truth.

Twenty-one employes of The Tribune were in the Mexican mobilization, and while none of them had the opportunity of seeing the whole mobilization that was afforded to Mr. Gibbons in his capacity as war correspondent, they all agree that insofar as Mr. Gibbons' observations concern matters which came under their personal observation, they are entirely accurate and contain no exaggeration.

The Tribune gladly consents to the publication of Mr. Gibbons' articles, believing that unless the public realizes how terrible was the inefficiency of the Texas mobilization it will not insist upon, and probably not even permit, the degree of military efficiency in our coming mobilization which alone can save us from catastrophe.

ROBERT R. MCCORMICK.
JOSEPH M. PATTERSON.

Editorial Offices
Chicago Tribune
March 9, 1917.

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THE MILITIA MOBILIZATION ON THE MEXICAN BORDER

HOW THE LACONIA SANK

I

IN THE DANGER ZONE

QUEENSTOWN, February 26, 1917.

I HAVE serious doubts whether this is a real story. I am not entirely certain that it is not all a dream. I feel that in a few minutes I may wake up back in stateroom B 19 on the promenade deck of the Cunarder *Laconia* and hear my cockney steward informing me with an abundance of "and sirs" that it is a fine morning.

It is now a little over thirty hours since I stood on the slanting decks of the big liner, listened to the lowering of the lifeboats, and heard the hiss of escaping steam and the roar of ascending rockets as they tore lurid rents in the black sky and cast their red glare over the r[illegible] sea.

I am writing thi[illegible]in th[illegible]es[illegible] stepping on the de[illegible]n Q[illegible]f[illegible]

British mine sweeper which picked up our open lifeboat after an eventful six hours of drifting and darkness and bailing and pulling on the oars and of straining aching eyes toward that empty, meaningless horizon in search of help.

But, dream or fact, here it is:

The Cunard liner *Laconia,* 18,000 tons burden, carrying seventy-three passengers—men, women, and children—of whom six were American citizens—manned by a mixed crew of two hundred and sixteen, bound from New York to Liverpool, and loaded with foodstuffs, cotton, and war material, was torpedoed without warning by a German submarine last night off the Irish coast. The vessel sank in about forty minutes.

Two American citizens, mother and daughter, listed from Chicago, and former residents there, are among the dead. They were Mrs. Mary E. Hoy and Miss Elizabeth Hoy. I have talked with a seaman who was in the same lifeboat with the two Chicago women and he has told me that he saw their lifeless bodies washed out of the sinking lifeboat.

The American survivors are Mrs. F. E. Harris, of Philadelphia, who was the last woman to leave the *Laconia;* the Rev. Father Wareing,

of St. Joseph's Seminary, Baltimore; Arthur T. Kirby, of New York, and myself.

A former Chicago woman, now the wife of a British subject, was among the survivors. She is Mrs. Henry George Boston, the daughter of Granger Farwell, of Lake Forest.

After leaving New York, passengers and crew had had three drills with the lifeboats. All were supplied with life-belts and assigned to places in the twelve big lifeboats poised over the side from the davits of the top deck.

Submarines had been a chief part of the conversation during the entire trip, but the subject had been treated lightly, although all ordered precautions were strictly in force. After the first explanatory drill on the second day out from New York, from which we sailed on Saturday, February 17, the "abandon ship" signal—five quick blasts on the whistle—had summoned us twice to our life-belts and heavy wraps, among which I included a flask and a flashlight, and to a roll call in front of our assigned boats on the top deck.

On Sunday we knew generally we were in the danger zone, though we did not know definitely where we were—or at least the passengers did not. In the afternoon during a short chat with

Captain W. R. D. Irvine, the ship's commander, I had mentioned that I would like to see a chart and note our position on the ocean. He replied: "O, would you?" with a smiling, rising inflection that meant, "It is jolly well none of your business."

Prior to this my cheery early morning steward had told us that we would make Liverpool by Monday night and I used this information in another question to the captain.

"When do we land?" I asked.

"I don't know," replied Capt. Irvine, but my steward told me later it would be Tuesday after dinner.

II

TORPEDOED AT NIGHT WITHOUT WARNING

THE first cabin passengers were gathered in the lounge Sunday evening, with the exception of the bridge fiends in the smoke-room.

"Poor Butterfly" was dying wearily on the talking machine and several couples were dancing.

About the tables in the smoke-room the conver-

sation was limited to the announcement of bids and orders to the stewards. Before the fireplace was a little gathering which had been dubbed as the Hyde Park corner—an allusion I don't quite fully understand. This group had about exhausted available discussion when I projected a new bone of contention.

"What do you say are our chances of being torpedoed?" I asked.

"Well," drawled the deliberative Mr. Henry Chetham, a London solicitor, "I should say four thousand to one."

Lucien J. Jerome, of the British diplomatic service, returning with an Ecuadorian valet from South America, interjected: "Considering the zone and the class of this ship, I should put it down at two hundred and fifty to one that we don't meet a sub."

At this moment the ship gave a sudden lurch sideways and forward. There was a muffled noise like the slamming of some large door at a good distance away. The slightness of the shock and the meekness of the report compared with my imagination were disappointing. Every man in the room was on his feet in an instant.

"We're hit!" shouted Mr. Chetham.

"That's what we've been waiting for," said Mr. Jerome.

"What a lousey torpedo!" said Mr. Kirby in typical New Yorkese. "It must have been a fizzer."

I looked at my watch. It was 10:30 P. M.

Then came the five blasts on the whistle. We rushed down the corridor leading from the smoke-room at the stern to the lounge, which was amidships. We were running, but there was no panic. The occupants of the lounge were just leaving by the forward doors as we entered.

It was dark on the landing leading down to the promenade deck, where the first class staterooms were located. My pocket flashlight, built like a fountain pen, came in handy on the landing.

We reached the promenade deck. I rushed into my stateroom, B 19, grabbed my overcoat and the water bottle and special life-preserver with which THE TRIBUNE had equipped me before sailing. Then I made my way to the upper deck on that same dark landing.

I saw the chief steward opening an electric switch box in the wall and turning on the switch. Instantly the boat decks were illuminated. That illumination saved lives.

ıe torpedo had hit us well astern on the star-
d side and had missed the engines and the
amos. I had not noticed the deck lights
ɔre. Throughout the voyage our decks had
ıained dark at night and all cabin portholes
re clamped down and all windows covered with
aque paint.

The illumination of the upper deck on which stood made the darkness of the water sixty feet elow appear all the blacker when I peered over he edge at my station, boat No. 10.

Already the boat was loading up and men were busy with the ropes. I started to help near a davit that seemed to be giving trouble, but was stoutly ordered to get out of the way and get into the boat.

We were on the port side, practically opposite the engine well. Up and down the deck passengers and crew were donning life-belts, throwing on overcoats, and taking positions in the boats. There were a number of women, but only one appeared hysterical—little Miss Titsie Siklosi, a French-Polish actress, who was being cared for by her manager, Cedric P. Ivatt, appearing on the passenger list as from New York.

Steam began to hiss somewhere from the giant

gray funnels that towered above. Suddenly there was a roaring swish as a rocket soared upward from the captain's bridge, leaving a comet's tail of fire. I watched it as it described a graceful arc in the black void overhead, and then, with an audible pop, it burst in a flare of brilliant white light.

There was a tilt to the deck. It was listing to starboard at just the angle that would make it necessary to reach for support to enable one to stand upright. In the meantime electric flood lights—large white enameled funnels containing clusters of bulbs—had been suspended from the promenade deck and illuminated the dark water that rose and fell on the slanting side of the ship.

"Lower away!" Some one gave the order and we started down with a jerk towards the seemingly hungry rising and falling swells.

Then we stopped with another jerk and remained suspended in mid-air while the man at the bow and the stern swore and tussled with the lowering ropes. The stern of the lifeboat was down, the bow up, leaving us at an angle of about forty-five degrees. We clung to the seats to save ourselves from falling out.

"Who's got a knife, a knife, a knife!" shouted a sweating seaman in the bow.

"Great God, give him a knife!" bawled a half-dressed, jibbering negro stoker, who wrung his hands in the stern.

A hatchet was thrust into my hand and I forwarded it to the bow. There was a flash of sparks as it crashed down on the holding pulley. One strand of the rope parted and down plunged the bow, too quick for the stern man. We came to a jerky stop with the stern in the air and the bow down, but the stern managed to lower away until the dangerous angle was eliminated.

Then both tried to lower together. The list of the ship's side became greater, but, instead of our boat sliding down it like a toboggan, the taffrail caught and was held. As the lowering continued, the other side dropped down and we found ourselves clinging on at a new angle and looking straight down on the water.

A hand slipped into mine and a voice sounded huskily close to my ear. It was the little old German Jew traveling man who was disliked in the smoke-room because he used to speak too certainly of things he was uncertain of and whose slightly Teutonic dialect made him as popular as smallpox with the British passengers.

"My boy, I can't see nutting," he said. "My

glasses slipped and I am falling. Hold me, please."

I managed to reach out and join hands with another man on the other side of the old man and together we held him in. He hung heavily over our arms, grotesquely grasping all he had saved from his stateroom—a goldheaded cane and an extra hat.

Many feet and hands pushed the boat from the side of the ship and we sagged down again, this time smacking squarely on the pillowy top of a rising swell. It felt more solid than midair, at least. But we were far from being off. The pulleys twice stuck in their fastenings, bow and stern, and the one ax passed forward and back, and with it my flashlight, as the entangling ropes that held us to the sinking *Laconia* were cut away.

Some shout from that confusion of sound caused me to look up and I really did so with the fear that one of the nearby boats was being lowered upon us.

A man was jumping, as I presumed, with the intention of landing in the boat and I prepared to avoid the impact, but he passed beyond us and plunged into the water three feet from the edge

of the boat. He bobbed to the surface immediately.

"It's Duggan!" shouted a man next to me.

I flashed the light on the ruddy, smiling face and water-plastered hair of the little Canadian, our fellow saloon passenger. We pulled him over the side. He sputtered out a mouthful of water and the first words he said were:

"I wonder if there is anything to that lighting three cigarets off the same match? I was up above trying to loosen the rope to this boat. I loosened it and then got tangled up in it. The boat went down, but I was jerked up. I jumped for it."

His first reference concerned our deliberate tempting of fates early in the day when he, Kirby, and I lighted three cigarets from the same match and Duggan told us that he had done the same thing many a time.

As we pulled away from the side of the ship, its ranking and receding terrace of lights stretched upward. The ship was slowly turning over. We were opposite that part occupied by the engine rooms. There was a tangle of oars, spars, and rigging on the seat and considerable confusion before four of the big sweeps

could be manned on either side of the boat.

The jibbering, bullet-headed negro was pulling directly behind me and I turned to quiet him as his frantic reaches with his oar were hitting me in the back. In the dull light from the upper decks I looked into his slanting face, eyes all whites and lips moving convulsively. Besides being frightened the man was freezing in the thin cotton shirt that composed his entire upper covering. He would work feverishly to get warm.

"Get away from her; get away from her," he kept repeating. "When the water hits her hot boilers, she'll blow up, and there's just tons and tons of shrapnel in the hold!"

His excitement spread to other members of the crew in the boat. The ship's baker, designated by his pantry headgear, became a competing alarmist, and a white fireman, whose blasphemy was nothing short of profound, added to the confusion by cursing everyone.

It was the give way of nerve tension. It was bedlam and nightmare.

III

THE LAST OF THE LACONIA

SEEKING to establish some authority in our boat, I made my way to the stern and there found an old, white-haired sea captain, a second cabin passenger, with whom I had talked before. He was bound from Nova Scotia with codfish. His sailing schooner, the *Secret,* had broken in two, but he and his crew had been taken off by a tramp and taken back to New York. He had sailed from there on the *Ryndam,* which, after almost crossing the Atlantic, had turned back. The *Laconia* was his third attempt to get home. His name is Captain Dear.

"The rudder's gone, but I can steer with an oar," he said. "I will take charge, but my voice is gone. You'll have to shout the orders."

There was only one way to get the attention of the crew and that was by an overpowering blast of profanity. I did my best and was rewarded by silence while I made the announcement that in the absence of the ship's officer assigned to the boat, Captain Dear would take charge. There was no dissent and under the captain's orders

the boat's head was held to the wind to prevent us from being swamped by the increasing swells.

We rested on our oars, with all eyes turned on the still lighted *Laconia*. The torpedo had struck at 10:30 P. M. According to our ship's time, it was thirty minutes after that hour that another dull thud, which was accompanied by a noticeable drop in the hulk, told its story of the second torpedo that the submarine had dispatched through the engine room and the boat's vitals from a distance of 200 yards.

We watched silently during the next minute, as the tiers of lights dimmed slowly from white to yellow, then to red, and nothing was left but the murky mourning of the night, which hung over all like a pall.

A mean, cheese-colored crescent of a moon revealed one horn above a rag bundle of clouds low in the distance. A rim of blackness settled around our little world, relieved only by general leering stars in the zenith, and where the *Laconia* lights had shone there remained only the dim outline of a blacker hulk standing out above the water like a jagged headland, silhouetted against the overcast sky.

The ship sank rapidly at the stern until at last

its nose stood straight in the air. Then it slid silently down and out of sight like a piece of disappearing scenery in a panorama spectacle.

Boat No. 3 stood closest to the ship and rocked about in a perilous sea of clashing spars and wreckage. As the boat's crew steadied its head into the wind, a black hulk, glistening wet and standing about eight feet above the surface of the water, approached slowly and came to a stop opposite the boat and not six feet from the side of it.

"What ship was dot?" the correct words in throaty English with the German accent came from the dark hulk, according to Chief Steward Ballyn's statement to me later.

"The *Laconia,*" Ballyn answered.

"Vot?"

"The *Laconia,* Cunard line," responded the steward.

"Vot did she weigh?" was the next question from the submarine.

"Eighteen thousand tons."

"Any passengers?"

"Seventy-three," replied Ballyn, "men, women, and children, some of them in this boat. She had over 200 in the crew."

"Did she carry cargo?"

"Yes."

"Vell, you'll be all right. The patrol will pick you up soon," and without further sound, save for the almost silent fixing of the conning tower lid, the submarine moved off.

"I thought it best to make my answers truthful and satisfactory, sir," said Ballyn when he repeated the conversation to me word for word. "I was thinking of the women and children in the boat. I feared every minute that somebody in our boat might make a hostile move, fire a revolver, or throw something at the submarine. I feared the consequences of such an act."

IV

ADRIFT IN OPEN BOATS

THERE was no assurance of an early pickup, even though the promise were from a German source, for the rest of the boats whose occupants —if they felt and spoke like those in my boat— were more than mildly anxious about our plight and the prospects of rescue.

We made preparations for the siege with the

elements. The weather was a great factor. That black rim of clouds looked ominous. There was a good promise of rain. February has a reputation for nasty weather in the north Atlantic. The wind was cold and seemed to be rising. Our boat bobbed about like a cork on the swells, which fortunately were not choppy.

"How much rougher weather could the boat stand?" This question and the conditions were debated pro and con.

"Had our rockets been seen?" "Did the first torpedo put the wireless out of business?" "Did anybody hear our S. O. S.?" "Was there enough food and drinking water in the boat to last?"

That brought us to an inventory of our small craft, and after much difficulty we found a lamp, a can of powder flares, a tin of ship's biscuits, matches, and spare oil.

The lamp was lighted. Other lights were visible at small distances every time we mounted the crest of the swells. The boats remained quite close together at first. One boat came within sound and I recognized the Harry Lauder-like voice of the second assistant purser, last heard on Wednesday at the ship's concert. There was singing, "I Want to Marry 'Arry," and "I Love to Be a Sailor."

Mrs. Boston was in that boat with her l band. She told me later that an attempt had l made to sing "Tipperary" and "Rule, Britan but the thought of that slinking dark hull destruction that might have been a part of immediate darkness resulted in an abandon of the effort.

"Who's the officer in that boat?" came a ch hail from a nearby light.

"What the hell is it to you?" bawled out half-frozen negro, for no reason imaginable c than, possibly, the relief of his feelings.

"Brain him with a pin, somebody!" yelled profound oathsman, and accompanied the o with a warmth of language that must have lieved the negro's chill.

The fear of some of the boats cras together produced a general inclination to further separation on the part of all the units of survivors, with the result that soon small craft stretched out for several miles, a them endeavoring to keep their heads into wind.

V

THE RESCUE BY THE BRITISH PATROL

AND then we saw the first light, the first sign of help coming, the first searching glow of white brilliance, deep down on the sombre sides of the black pot of night that hung over us. I don't know what direction that came from—none of us knew north from south—there was nothing but water and sky. But the light—it just came from over there where we pointed.

We nudged violently sick boat-mates and directed their gaze and aroused them to an appreciation of the sight that gave us new life.

It was way over there—first a trembling quiver of silver against the blackness, then, drawing closer, it defined itself as a beckoning finger, although still too far away to see our feeble efforts to attract.

We nevertheless wasted valuable flares and the ship's baker, self-ordained custodian of biscuit tin, did the honors handsomely to the extent of a biscuit apiece to each of the twenty-three occupants in the boat.

"Pull starboard, sonnies," sang out old Cap-

tain Dear, his gray chin whiskers literally bristling with joy in the light of the round lantern which he held aloft.

We pulled lustily, forgetting the strain and pain of innards torn and racked from vain vomiting, oblivious of blistered hands and yet half-frozen feet.

Then a nodding of that finger of light—a happy, snapping, crap-shooting finger that seemed to say "Come on, you men," like a dice player wooing the bones—led us to believe that our lights had been seen. This was the fact, for immediately the coming vessel flashed on its green and red side-lights and we saw it was headed for our position.

We floated off its stern for a while as it maneuvered for the best position in which it could take us on with the sea that was running higher and higher, it seemed to me.

"Come alongside port!" was megaphoned to us, and as fast as we could we swung under the stern and felt our way broadside toward the ship's side. A dozen flashlights blinked down to us and orders began to flow fast and thick.

When I look back on the night, I don't know which was the more hazardous—our descent from

the *Laconia* or our ascent to our rescuer. One minute the swell lifted us almost level with the rail of the low-built patrol boat and mine sweeper, the next receding wave would carry us down into a gulf over which the ship's side glowed like a slimy, dripping cliff. A score of hands reached out, and we were suspended in the husky, tattooed arms of those doughty British jack tars, looking up into the weather-beaten, youthful faces, mumbling thanks and thankfulness, and reading in the gold lettering on their pancake hats the legend *"H. M. S. Laburnum."*

VI

LANDING THE SURVIVORS

WE had been six hours in the open boats, all of which began coming alongside one after another. Wet and bedraggled survivors were lifted aboard. Women and children first was the rule.

The scenes of reunion were heart-gripping. Men who had remained strangers to one another aboard the *Laconia* wrung each other by the hand, or embraced without shame the frail little wife of a Canadian chaplain who had found one of

her missing children delivered up from another boat. She smothered the child with ravenous mother kisses while tears of joy streamed down her face.

Boat after boat came alongside. The water-logged craft containing the captain came last. A rousing cheer went up as he landed his feet on the deck, one mangled hand hanging limp at his side.

The jack tars divested themselves of outer clothing and passed the garments over to the shivering members of the *Laconia's* crew.

The little officers' quarters down under the quarterdeck were turned over to the women and children. Two of the *Laconia's* stewardesses passed boiling basins of navy cocoa and aided in the disentanglement of wet and matted tresses.

The men grouped themselves near steam pipes in the petty officers' quarters or over the gratings of the engine rooms, where new life was to be had from the upward blasts of heated air that brought with them the smell of bilge water and oil and sulphur from the bowels of the vessel.

The injured—all minor cases, sprained backs, wrenched legs, or mashed hands—were put away in bunks under the care of the ship's doctor.

Dawn was melting the eastern ocean gray to pink when the task was finished.

In the officers' quarters, now invaded by the men, somebody happened to touch a key on the small wooden organ, and this was enough to send some callous seafaring fingers over the keys in a rhythm unquestionably religious and so irresistible under the circumstances that, although no one knew the words, the air was taken up in a serious humming chant by all in the room.

At the last note of the amen, little Father Wareing, his black garb snaggled in places and badly soiled, stood before the center table and lifted his head back until the morning light, filtering through the open hatch above him, shone down on his kindly, weary face. He recited the Lord's Prayer, all present joined, and the simple, impressive service ended as simply as it had begun.

Two minutes later I saw the old German Jew traveling man limping about on one lame leg with a little boy in his arms, collecting big round British pennies for the youngster.

A survey and cruise of the nearby area revealed no more occupied boats and the mine sweeper, with its load of survivors numbering 267, steamed away to the east. A half-an-hour's

steaming and the vessel stopped within hailing distance of two sister ships, towards one of which an open boat, manned by jackies, was pulling.

I saw the hysterical French-Polish actress, her hair wet and bedraggled, lifted out of the boat and handed up the companionway. Then a little boy, his fresh pink face and golden hair shining in the morning light, was passed upward, followed by some other survivors, numbering fourteen in all, who had been found half drowned and almost dead from exposure in a partially wrecked boat that was just sinking.

This was the boat in which Mrs. Hoy and her daughter lost their lives and in which Cedric P. Ivatt of New York, who was the manager for the actress, died. It has not been ascertained here whether Mr. Ivatt was an American citizen or a British subject.

One of the survivors of this boat was Able Seaman Walley, who was transferred to the *Laburnum.*

"Our boat—No. 8—was smashed in lowering," he said. "I was in the bow, Mrs. Hoy and her daughter were sitting toward the stern. The boat filled with water rapidly. It was no use trying to bail it out—there was a big hole in the side and

it came in too fast. It just sunk to the water's edge and only stayed up on account of the tanks in it. It was completely awash. Every swell rode clear over us and we had to hold our breath until we came to the surface again. The cold water just takes the strength out of you.

"The women got weaker and weaker, then a wave came and washed both of them out of the boat. There were life-belts on their bodies and they floated away, but I believe they were dead before they were washed overboard."

With such stories ringing in our ears, with exchanges of experiences pathetic and humorous, we came steaming into Queenstown harbor shortly after ten o'clock tonight. We pulled up at a dock lined with waiting ambulances and khaki-clad men, who directed the survivors to the various hotels about the town, where they are being quartered.

The question being asked of the Americans on all sides is: "Is it the *casus belli?*"

American Consul Wesley Frost is forwarding all information to Washington with a speed and carefulness resulting from the experiences in handling twenty-five previous submarine disasters in which the United States has had an in-

terest, especially in the survivors landed at this port.

His best figures on the *Laconia* sinking are: Total survivors landed here, 267; landed at Bantry, 14; total on board, 294; missing 13.

The latest information from Bantry, the only other port at which survivors are known to have been landed, confirms the report of the death of Mrs. Hoy and her daughter.

THE MILITIA MOBILIZATION ON THE MEXICAN BORDER

THE MILITIA MOBILIZATION ON THE MEXICAN BORDER

I.

THE CALL TO THE COLORS.

September, 1916.

WITHOUT a single man killed in action, without a single engagement with an enemy, without the firing of a hostile shot, the armed civilian forces of the United States, numbering approximately 100,000 men, have been drawn up in more or less military array along the nation's border for more than two months. These American citizens left their many homes and families, their jobs, stores, and factories, when war was in the air. A national crisis was at hand—or at least everybody was led to believe that it was. In each troop-train that hurried borderward, guardsmen were hoping and praying that hostilities would not begin until they had reached the firing line.

It was a glorious sight for those who believed

that one bugle blast from the *porte-cochère* of the White House and "a million men would spring to arms."

It was a disheartening spectacle but at the same time an "I told you so" demonstration for those who believe in the democracy of universal military service, big navy, and unquestioning support of American rights by force, anywhere, any time, anyhow.

It is a matter of suspended judgment for another and larger class, which subscribes to neither of the extreme doctrines of the pacifist or the militarist, but believes soundly in that poorly defined something called "adequate national defense." These "rationalists" are now ready to consider the performances and results of the last two months' pursuit of military duties on the border by the federalized militia.

Our national experience in defensiveness has been a costly one. The government has paid millions for the transporting and supplying of the men who answered the call to the colors. The men themselves have paid millions in lost time, lost salary, lost profits, lost opportunities. The stay-at-homes, some of them, have paid other unestimated sums for the relief of militia depen-

dents. Industries crippled at a time of glorious shortage of labor and consequent wage prosperity suffered the loss of their militia employes, many of whom held important posts in the industrial organization.

The total cost will be a difficult one to compute. It will be enormous. Now to take advantage of the expenditure. Now to get our money's worth, dollar for dollar; now to reap the benefits of the lesson, to learn what there is to be learned, what we have paid to learn, and credit the sum total cost to education.

To begin with, there is one fact of which the general public is not aware. That is that the border mobilization was not planned by the general staff of the War Department. This staff is composed of the brains of the army for the purpose of giving the nation the benefit of scientific direction and management of its military affairs. The notion of sending untrained troops to the border at the time they were sent did not originate in the mind of the general staff. And it is the generally accepted belief—among regular army officers—that the sudden call to the border was diametrically opposed to the recommendations of the general staff.

The regular army plan for the mobilization, so far as it has leaked out, called for the assembly of the several state guards in their respective state concentration points where their organization was to be completed, the work of recruiting up to war strength begun, and, more important still, the enormous labor of completely equipping the militiamen. Following this, the plan specified the mobilization of the troops in army posts in or adjacent to their states, where the men could occupy the barracks left empty by the departure of all the regular forces for the border.

In these army posts, upon which the nation has spent millions of dollars, the militiamen were to have received their soldierly training under all the accommodations of barrack life, which would have permitted a greater application of time and effort on drilling and thoroughly acquainting the men with the use of their arms. Relieved of the distracting and uninteresting labor of camp housekeeping, the ditch digging, the brush cutting, the potato peeling, and sanitation drudgery, the men were to have devoted their entire energies to an intensive study of soldiering, target practice, fire control and distribution, field maneuvers, lectures, officer school, etc.

There was nothing new about the plan. It is in use today in the training camps in Canada, in Australia, and other contributing colonies of the entente allies, where the regiments of territorials are being trained and drilled at or near their homes, in accustomed climates while they habituate themselves to unaccustomed work and unaccustomed diet. It has always been used in Germany, in France—the great military nations. The "seasoning" process which is concomitant with the scientifically abandoned deception that men to become soldiers must be exposed to privations, discomforts, and a general "roughing it" program, has in the experience of the last few years been condemned as a debilitating detriment to individual military effectiveness.

In Montreal the camp drudgery is done by prisoners, laborers, and fighting ineffectives. The soldiers-to-be undergo ten hours' strict soldier training daily for six days a week, and on the seventh they have a recreation period which permits them to visit the city and spend the day with their friends or family. The recruits are not sent far away to some unaccustomed climate to learn their new vocation. And Canada is at war.

Although the border mobilization of the militia

was secretly condemned by the military experts, in view of its absolute ignoring of the general staff's recommendations, the War Department, working under the handicap of unpreparedness as to plans, ways, or means, applied itself obediently to the will of the state department or whatever governmental division directed the border bungle.

Away went the boys to the border, bands playing, flags waving, mothers crying, fathers choking, sweethearts thrilling, cameras snapping, typewriters clacking, transmitters clicking, newsboys shouting, everybody cheering—

Away they went to dare and do
For the old red, white, and blue,
Villa chasing,
Self-effacing,
Through the mesquite in the cactus,
Bully boys they were that backed us,
Double timing,
Songsters rhyming,
"Dolly Gray" and "Blue Bell" chiming,
Busting greasers
On their beezers,
"Up and beat 'em"—ad infinitum.

II

EN ROUTE

TRANSPORTATION was the first difficulty which betrayed the lack of industrial preparedness. The railroads did wonderfully well—far better than it was expected they could do. They had never done so well before. The rail managers pointed with pride to their achievements. Yet in moving 100,000 men across the continent to the border, nothing more was accomplished than has been done numerous times during large national conventions or world's expositions.

The militiamen wanted sleeping cars, and the minute they asked for them up went the cry of "mollycoddle," and the stay-at-home wits began to inquire whether each of the boys in khaki would like to have his valet in attendance throughout the campaign. Sleeping-cars were not necessary. That was proved by dozens of troop-trains of dingy, overloaded day-coaches from the Atlantic seaboard lines, which reached the Rio Grande valley after five and six days' railroad buffeting, and discharged their weary, sleepless, unwashed human freight.

There were plenty of sleeping-cars. But they were in use by the regular traffic. You see the reason the militiamen asked for sleeping-cars was this—they felt they were the fire department answering the alarm. As such they believed they should have had precedence over all other traffic. They felt that in return for the sacrifices they were making in rushing to the colors, the general public should make some compensating sacrifice, particularly if such sacrifice would enable the men to reach the border sooner and in better condition.

"We can get along without sleepers all right," one Massachusetts infantryman told me as he and his company detrained from dilapidated Boston and Albany day coaches in El Paso. "We can travel in box cars if there is the necessity, but there has been no need of it. You can satisfy your hunger all right with a cup of black coffee and three hardtack, but there is no use eating that stuff if there is roast beef and potatoes in front of you, or even a Saturday night mess of 'Boston baked.'"

And speaking of food recalls the disquieting dispatches from Cleveland and other points where the headlines shoot home twinges of responsibility with "MILITIA EN ROUTE RIOT FOR FOOD,"

"GUARDSMEN STORM RESTAURANTS," and "SOLDIERS LEAVE TRAINS TO RAID GROCERY STORES." "Food riots" is the phrase to which we were accustomed only in connection with British stories of conditions in Germany or our own unemployment problem.

The food shortage on the troop trains was attributed to three causes. They were: Insufficiency of supplies, untastefulness of diet, and poor management of what supplies there were. Some New Yorkers told me that they made the entire trip on hardtack and water—prison fare. Some with private funds were able to purchase sandwiches at wayside stations, but officers who donated large sums to the relief of their men on the trip found many instances where they were unable to buy food in sufficient quantities. Many were the telegrams that were sent on in advance of the troop-trains to have 2,000 hard-boiled eggs waiting at such and such a station at such and such a time, and many were the disappointments and belt tightenings when the food failed to appear.

It is admitted that there was much wastage of supplies and there is no question that "wilful waste" drew its complement of "woeful want."

Lack of experience on the part of the guardsmen was the reason. Empty stomach traveling ended upon the arrival of the militiamen in the southwest—the happy hunting ground of the real estate gentry, the land of salesmen, the colony builders, and the town lot peddlers.

Thus it was that the militiamen, detrained at their respective destinations along the border, were marched forth to the edges of the prospective metropolis at which they had landed and there introduced to the brush-covered jungle which they were to improve and change to the site for a future town addition.

In many of the towns the industrious booster bund had sent gangs of Mexican laborers through the brush to decimate the undergrowth with their machetes, and in other places to lay water piping for the company streets which had been planned hurriedly by the regular army officers in charge of designating the camp sites. The men went to work with a will, clearing the brush, digging draining ditches, hauling, carting, carrying.

In Brownsville the Iowa brigade landed and took the first look at its future home. Cactus and mesquite, Spanish dagger and ebony brush, mud, water, heat and insects were the tenants to

be ousted. Animal and vegetable life alike wore horns and thorns, stickers and prickers, stingers and biters. Fleas and flies, mosquitoes and chiggers, blister bugs and buzzing beetles, tarantulas, scorpions, centipedes of all sizes and colors, snakes of varying length, complexion and disposition, all joined with the local chamber of commerce in extending a rousing welcome.

III.

IN MAÑANA LAND

IT WAS the same throughout that tropical strip which is called the lower Rio Grande valley and which bears the military designation of the Brownsville district. It was slightly different but no better, to the north and west along the sandy desert wastes to the border river. Westward from El Paso along the boundary lines the scenery changed to a more somber desolate hue, the air became lighter, the sun seemingly stronger, but the average condition of the militiamen was pretty much the same as those tucked away in the geographical end of all things where the Rio Grande, the Gulf of Mexico, the United States of America, and the Dis-United States of Mexico collide.

For seemingly unending hours, days, and weeks the guardsmen labored on their improvement work, their town addition building, their road construction, their camp housekeeping duties—"knitting," as the men called it. White inhabitants of the "*mañana* land" frontier looked on and marveled. "White men," which is the nomenclature for those who are not Mexicans, complimented the display of northern "pep" with which the guardsmen attacked the work in front of them. In the Rio Grande tropics such labor is done only by Mexicans, of whom there are thousands who work for from fifty cents to one dollar a day.

The colonel of an Iowa regiment showed me his men, tugging away at loaded transport wagons, working in the places of the absent army mules, to drag the loaded vehicles away from the camp and dump the collected refuse. The regiment was shy on mules. The men had to place their shoulders to the yoke.

The duration of this labor and the extent to which it interfered with the training of the men is officially hinted in a recent published statement from General Parker, commander of the Brownsville district. When domestic pressure

was being applied to bring about the recall of the First Illinois cavalry to its home state, General Parker, in advising against the recall, said that the regiment had almost completed the fatigue work and was just ready to get some good training. This was after the pick and shovel exercise had lasted three months.

The medical officers were determined to prevent a repetition of Chattanooga and Montauk Point. Intensive sanitation, that peace-time occupation which keeps idle soldiers busy after they are trained, was pursued vigorously. In some of the camps it became necessary to dig long drainage ditches to carry off the surface water, which increased the insect life to a menace. The size of these works might be inferred from the names with which the men dubbed them—"the Panama Canal," "the English Channel," and "Gondola Avenue."

Construction of latrines, mess-halls, incinerators, the oiling of stagnant water, hauling and similar labors engaged the time and energy of the northerners and northwesterners and northeasterners, under the direct rays of a tropical sun which drove the mercury up to 127 and even beyond.

I stood one day in front of the quarters of Brigadier General Dyer of the Second New York brigade, at McAllen, Texas, and saw the thermometer register 125. By placing the palm of the hand on the glass the mercury could be made to fall almost to blood heat.

"We are human refrigerators," one of the general's aids said.

"I think the thermometer is wrong," observed the general.

He brought another instrument from within his quarters and replaced the first one in the sun. We stood by and watched the indicator rise from 98 to 118 degrees.

It was in such igneous air as this that the citizen soldier jumped into work which only Mexican peons, weazened and withered as to exterior but wiry and enduring as to internal arrangement, attempted to perform in this part of the country. I heard Texans of long border experience say they would mutiny if forced to such extremes.

Of course, there was no mutiny. The men stood the gaff. They stood it like good fellows. Certainly it was hot. They became dizzy from the sun. Climatic combinations tended to debilitate, to sap strength and stamina, but they bore

it. Unaccustomed to the work, unaccustomed to the climate, unaccustomed to the diet, they went at whatever was put before them with blind faith in the belief that it was making soldiers of them. Every man in the national guard wanted to be a soldier.

IV

CAMP FARE

THERE was much difficulty with the food, but most of the blame devolved upon the shoulders of the cooks, who were untrained in the preparation of army rations. The depot quartermaster, as far as I was able to learn, was never remiss in his supplies of coffee, bacon, hardtack, beans, and flour. The supplies, dealt out on the basis of twenty-six cents' worth per day per man, were seldom missing, but it was a diet which the men found hard to stomach day after day. Said a Virginia infantryman one day, as I was walking through his company street at mess time: "This is the same grub the army deals out to the men up in Alaska in midwinter. I wonder why we can't get some fresh vegetables. That's all they are supposed to produce in this valley."

Leaden pellets of uncooked rice are far from

appetizing, and the fact that the cook is a friend of yours and you know that he is doing the best he can doesn't relieve the indigestion and intestinal disorders that are sure to follow. Ptomaine poison was certain to break out, and it did. There were 203 serious cases of the poisoning in one Minnesota regiment at Llano Grande on account of canned stuffs. The cooks of the regiment reported that when they jabbed a knife into some of the cans of tomatoes which were issued to them the cans immediately spouted blood-red geysers of sour catsup.

When the grumbling about the food began there was a marked improvement, and in many regiments regular army cooks arrived, tardily, to explain cuisine mysteries to their civilian protégés. Competent cooks could have been obtained, but the army will not pay the wages of an assistant cook at a third-class restaurant in the "loop."

Private funds, both individual and collective, went far toward satisfying the militiamen's healthy craving for a more varied diet than the army ration permitted. Infantry companies from the southern part of Minnesota supplemented their messes by purchases from company funds which

ranged all the way from $200 to $2,000, raised from public subscriptions back in the towns from which the companies came. The "boys" looked upon that fund as a life saver after a few weeks of the heavy, heatening "chow."

With the arrival of the militiamen numerous restaurants sprang up over night in the nearby towns and on the edges of the camps. Quite frequently these institutions contributed momentary satiety to the hunger gnawing, but subsequently internal revolutions, too. Brownsville newspapers editorially advocated the establishment of food inspection in these "eating houses." By way of comparison with the tiresome camp fare, it was worth a trial, anyway, and men who could afford it ate in town as frequently as their pocketbooks and camp leave would permit.

In McAllen, the headquarters for the New York division, one Greek met another Greek, and of course, they opened up a restaurant, under the sign "Jack's Branch, 2,500 Miles From Broadway." In Brownsville the "Chicago Bar" advertised free lunch, while the Manhattan and Oriental Café presented elaborate bills of fare, from which at times diners could select something that happened to be in stock. At San An-

tonio and El Paso there was real food to be had—regular meals, with music and lights and dancing, roof gardens, cabarets, all to supply a change from the "come-and-get-it" stuff.

Dainty tastes and finicky appetites were put to rout by the stomachs that had to supply the steam for all the work that had to be done. The enormous amount of camp labor, which is well called "fatigue," and the order of General Funston interfered greatly with the real soldier training of the men. It was decreed that the men were not to be drilled or placed on hard fatigue between the hours of 10 A. M. and 3 P. M., on account of the heat. This order was followed as closely as the troop commanders could, although there were numerous unnecessary exceptions. The regimental veterinarians heartily concurred in the order, because they had in mind the condition of the few horses possessed by the regiment, of which approximately ten per cent were on the sick picket line most of the time.

V.

A TEXAS HURRICANE

AGAIN, the destructiveness of the rain and wind storms seemed to make the fatigue almost interminable. After rains, drill schedules would have to be abandoned for days while new ditches were dug or old ones deepened or extended, or surface water drained, or oiled, or blown-down tents re-erected and patched together. One night the wind and rain were so intense that the majority of the 40,000 men in the valley found themselves shelterless and forced to abandon their camps for the more stable habitations of the nearest town. General Parker's orders on that day read:

HEADQUARTERS BROWNSVILLE DISTRICT,
Brownsville, Texas,
August 18, 1916.

From: District Commander.

To: All commanding officers of troops in Brownsville Camps.

Subject: Preparation for storm.

1. In view of the increasing severity of the storm and the weather prophecy that it will not reach its height of violence until near midnight tonight, it may be necessary to take temporary shelter in the town of Brownsville. In

that case the commanding general directs assignment of shelter as follows:

Iowa brigade, brigade headquarters and First regiment to city hall.

Second Iowa to public school building.

Third Iowa and company of Iowa engineers to the courthouse.

First Illinois cavalry, new schoolhouse.

Virginia Troops.

First regiment to Fort Brown.

Second regiment to moving picture theaters.

One battalion Iowa field artillery to Hinckley hall.

All field hospitals and ambulance companies on Victoria Heights to the new base hospital.

Thirty-sixth infantry to any shelter in the vicinity of their camp south of Levee street. Suggested freight and passenger depots or large mills or warehouses along railroad.

Battery D, Fifth field artillery, to quartermaster's depot at rice mill.

2. Any detachments of troops left unprovided for to Fort Brown. Detachments under an officer will be left in each camp to look after public animals and government property.

3. The regiments will march equipped for the field and carry two days' cooked rations and receptacles for making coffee; candles and lamps will be taken.

4. Officers will remain with their organizations.

By command of Brigadier General Parker.

F. McCoy,
Captain Third Cavalry, Acting Chief of Staff.

The only camp in the storm district not blown down was that of the First Illinois cavalry, which had been floored and framed by private subscription raised by Colonel Foreman after Secretary of War Baker had refused the recommendation of the local commanders for lumber.

VI

FIELD TRAINING UNDER DIFFICULTIES

THESE conditions, ever recurring during the ten weeks in which I observed the militiamen, prevented adequate training. Other detracting features were lack of facilities for training and lack of equipment. Many of the regiments were on the border six weeks without having as much as fired one single practice shot.

At San Benito, the camp of the First Oklahoma infantry, I talked with Captain Jarboe, who four years ago was the champion long distance rifle shot of the world. He said that his men only theoretically knew how to insert a cartridge into the chambers of their rifles. No ammunition had been issued to them. There had been no target practice for the regiment since the state encamp-

ment the year before, and with the organization increased about fifty per cent by recruits, he said he believed there were some men in the regiment who had never fired a gun.

The Iowa and Virginia brigades at Brownsville were in little better condition. The first night, sentries from among these boys from the prairies and the Blue Ridge walked their lonely posts on the edge of the clearings, their guns were empty and so were their belts. "If anybody had tried to jump our camp, we would have had to club 'em back," said an Iowan.

At Llano Grande, where Brigadier General Lewis commanded the provisional division composed of Indiana, Minnesota, Nebraska, and North Dakota troops, a month and a half had expired before arrangements had been made to train the men in the actual firing of their rifles.

Then the training was conducted on a miniature scale. The size and range of the targets were reduced to suit cramped accommodations. The targets were located only 100 feet from the firing line. The men started to train in small numbers at these "shooting gallery" ranges, and many of them confessed that they had no idea of a distance of 500 yards, which is the battle-sight range

with the Springfield rifles. The range of this gun extends to 2,000 yards and more, a distance at which the American soldier with his high-powered, long-range weapon would have the advantage over Mexicans armed with shorter range pieces. But throughout the first two months of the border mobilization even such practice was limited.

At San Antonio, apparently there was no available space for field exercises or target practice, because the infantry regiments, long before they had been completely shod, were marched twenty miles or more to practice grounds where they could do target work and maneuvers. Through this arrangement the efficiency of the men was reduced, not only by the heat of the unaccustomed marches in which hundreds collapsed, but the discomforts attendant upon living in pup-tents and the scarcity of water supply.

The Illinois artillery arrived at San Antonio with only one battery that had even fired a shot. A month later when the batteries went to Leon Springs for maneuvers and practice, regular army instructors severely criticised the organization and said that they would be worse than useless in field operations owing to their slowness

in taking and leaving positions and manipulating the guns. Nevertheless, the batteries were restricted to a few rounds of ammunition with which to attempt improvement. The Minnesota artillery at Llano Grande had had only sub-caliber practice—which means aiming a cannon and firing a pistol blank cartridge.

VII

CAVALRY AND ARTILLERY NOT READY

NON-UNIFORMITY of equipment resulted in further reduction of efficiency, not to mention the military appearance of the guardsmen. Some wore khaki of one hue, some of another; some had leggings of one vintage and some of another; some had the back packs of the latest model and others had the old smother rolls that were over the left shoulder, complemented by a cumbersome haversack dangling from the left hip. Some had the new bottle canteens and others had the old pancake variety.

These incongruities extended into the vital matter of arms. In a cavalry regiment at Brownsville some of the men carried the new

regulation automatic pistols, while the rest were provided with an old issue sidearm of the revolver type. This meant that the regiment would have to depend upon being supplied with two different kinds of ammunition, 38-caliber cartridges for the old revolvers and 45-caliber shells for the new automatics. In addition, some of the troops had the old curved sabers and others had the new lance sabers, each calling for a different set of regulations covering their use. An assorted shipment of saddles, some of one color leather, some of another, completed the hodgepodge.

The lack of horses was felt by all of the militia organizations. The infantry regiments could not get enough mounts for officers and orderlies or mules for the transport wagons. This handicap greatly interfered with and consequently prolonged the camp work, which meant just that much more time away from drilling. Again, the lack of transport prevented the foot regiments from attempting extended marches as regiments and removed the possibility of their ever crossing the border, if the order for invasion had been received.

It is no recent knowledge that an army travels on its stomach and without transport service a

regiment is without supplies for the traveling bellies. Consequently it would be able to advance just as far as the food carried individually by the men would take them.

Artillery regiments were in almost the same fix. Not only were most of them unable to obtain mules for their combat wagons, but horses to drag the field pieces were missing. The Iowa artillery at Brownsville didn't have enough horses. The Illinois batteries arrived with only a handful of horses, hardly sufficient to haul a small portion of their armament and supply trains. The Indiana artillery at Llano Grande was able to move about as far as a coast defense fort; the Minnesota artillery at the same place could just as well have changed its military designation from field artillery to stationary artillery. The New York artillery brigade had horses enough for one and a half regiments when I visited it two months after its arrival at the "front."

"Dead horses" was the name which the men applied to the majority of the animals which were received from the government. Most of them were undersized, soft, and sickly. The picket lines of the veterinarians usually had ten per cent of the

unit's horseflesh under treatment for influenza, catarrh, and shipping fever. Frequent applications of creosote were necessary to keep the animals from being devoured by ticks and insects. When one militia outfit at Brownsville brought its horses to Fort Brown to have them shod, the regular army veterinarians refused to permit the animals in the same corral with the regular army horses on account of the condition of the militia live stock.

Then there was the matter of horseshoes, or rather there wasn't the matter of horseshoes. The matter really was that there were no horseshoes. Our cavalry and artillery horses were barefooted. It wasn't so bad when the ground was soft from the rains, but when the road became hard and baked under the sun equination ceased or was indulged in with utmost care on account of the barefooted condition of the horses. The First Illinois cavalry after weeks of requisitioning received some horseshoes, but not enough to shoe the regiment and not more than enough to shoe the front feet of the insufficient number of horses which the regiment had. In all mounted regiments the scarcity of horseshoes and quite frequently the absence of tools and horseshoeing

outfits would have made horseshoeing out of the question, even if horseshoes had been obtainable.

At Llano Grande, Batteries A, B, and C of Indiana were without horseshoes, although after six weeks they had received horses. Because the horses were barefooted the officers had to drill the artillerymen on foot. The guardsmen manned the field pieces as they used to back in their Indiana armories every Thursday night, and went through stationary firing drills, but mounted practice was out of the question.

Of this Indiana battalion one officer told me that none of the men in the organization had fired a real shot in more than a year and that there were some of the recruits who had never heard a cannon fired. He said that arrangements were being made with Fort Brown to transport the men of the Indiana units to Brownsville on motor trucks and there borrow the guns of the Iowa artillery for firing practice on old Palo Alto battlefield, ten miles out of that town. This meant, if carried out, that the gunners would practice marksmanship on one set of guns and then, if needed in battle, would try their luck on an entirely different set.

The Minnesota artillery at Llano Grande could not move because of the universal discrepancy be-

tween sizes of the horses' necks and the sizes of the army steel collars. The collars did not fit and apparently were not possible of an adjustment that would make them fit. The result was that extended mounted drill was impracticable and officers of the battalion were trying to arrange to have the pieces dragged to Brownsville behind motor trucks so that the men could get some much needed firing practice. Palo Alto battlefield was the only place in the valley where the army could secure a sufficient expanse of unpopulated land for artillery practice, and its flatness, absence of ridges and rolling country made the test of up-to-date indirect firing out of the question.

The First New York cavalry and its fashionable satellite, Squadron A, brought most of their horses with them to McAllen, where they were placed in camp with a twenty-acre swamp on one side of them and the brigade dump on the other side. The swamp contributed mosquitoes and the dump incubated flies and gnats. I watched a trooper in this camp as he conveyed a spoonful of beans from his mess kit to his mouth. He lifted the spoon with his left hand while with his right hand he fanned it to protect it from insects on the trip to the mouth. Two men conversing in the open

took on the appearance of a prize ring contest, or pantomime, or a case of St. Vitus's dance. The helpless horses were subjected to a constant night-and-day irritation from the hungry swarms.

I talked with the colonel of the First New York horse for ten minutes and became exhausted from swinging hands and arms in front of my face and head to keep the horde of insects in motion.

"We're going to move to another site," the colonel said. "We can't stand it here."

Neither could I.

VIII

QUARTERMASTER DEPARTMENT HARD PUT

THE divisional cavalry of New York was fortunate in completing its quota of horses. One of its officers happened to be detailed to the horse purchasing board in San Antonio, with the result that his regiment was probably the first and possibly the only completely mounted militia cavalry unit on the border.

The First Illinois cavalry attempted three practice marches with its horses. Only one squadron could ride at a time, because to put one squad-

ron on horse left the other two squadrons on the ground. The horses walked about eighteen miles on each of the two days. They marched at a rate less than two and a quarter miles per hour, which is also less than the infantry rate. These marches so exhausted the horses that the third squadron never had its march.

On the contrary there was no mounted drill for four days. The reason was that the two short walks had made the horses unfit for immediate use. During the four days, the cavalrymen drilled on foot or went back to pick and shovel exercises. After two months' presence on the border this regiment, when ordered to move twenty-six miles to Point Isabel for maneuvers, had to send a large number of its men on motor trucks.

I know one cavalryman in that regiment who told me he had never been on a horse. I heard another one paraphrase an old burlesque gag. He said, "If I had a saddle, I would take a ride if I had a horse." Yes, it is true that the regiment did not have enough saddles. Frantic appeals to San Antonio finally brought a shipment of saddles, but not enough. The cases that contained them bore the date "1898," I was told by a lieu-

tenant who opened them and found the saddles to be of black leather and an ancient issue. The dry hide crackled with the salt with which it had become impregnated when it was under the Galveston flood.

The leather tore almost like paper. A charge, an extra pressure on the stirrup, a parting of the straps, a plunge over the horse's head, a broken neck. It all happened except the broken neck. The trooper was only stunned.

Concerning military equipment the American layman's knowledge is usually confined to a recollection that it is all marked "U. S." On a train through the camps of the Brownsville district I sat behind an officer's wife. She was from Chicago. We were passing rows of tents that bore the black stamp "I. C."

"I thought they were all marked 'U. S.'," she said to her seat mate. "What is 'I. C.' for? Oh, I know; they are railroad tents; the government borrowed them from the Illinois Central."

A lieutenant across the aisle corrected her.

"'I. C.' means 'Inspected and Condemned,'" he said, and added: "And there are tons of equipment through this valley that the inspectors haven't stamped yet."

It was "I. C." canvas, in holes and shreds, that covered the sick of the Fourth United States infantry at Fort Brown. There were the sick men, there was the ragged tentage over them, there was the convicting lettering "I. C." And for the tenting which the inspectors had kindly missed because there was no new canvas to replace it, the elements stamped their further condemnation with more rents and tears.

"I. C." is better than no canvas at all, and so it was that all organizations clung with deathlike grip to what they had and prayed that it would last until new covering could be obtained. Much of it failed. Little of the tentage was uniform or new. There were white tents and brown tents, pyramidal tents and conical Sibleys, and wall tents of all sizes. "Just like the gypsies," said one officer of an El Paso camp as he waved his hand at the assortment.

The machine gun troop of the First New York cavalry had no tents at all, and after six weeks in the federal service its members were still bunking around the regiment in the tents of other troops. The regular limit of occupants for one of the new pyramidal tents is eight men, but a large number of these tents were crowded with ten occupants.

Eight companies of the Third Indiana infantry were without camp tentage from June 11, the day of their arrival at Llano Grande, until July 24, and rain fell in torrents much of the time. "We were an example of unpreparedness," one officer told me.

This regiment had cots for half of the men after six weeks in camp, during which time the men who could not purchase cots from private funds were sleeping on the ground—the mud, because there had been no lumber for flooring issued. Many of the men improvised flooring from boxes, crates, fence boards, barn doors, or any nearby lumber that wasn't chained down.

In this connection I recall that a dismantled brick property on the edge of the First Illinois cavalry camp at Brownsville underwent a gradual metamorphosis, by which it became a much envied causeway through the mud of one troop street, with enough left over to make a piazza for the regimental hospital tent. That private brick pile seemed to melt away like salt before the nightly visits of the foragers.

Llano Grande, after two months' occupation, contributed one Venetian effect which was a source of much complaint on the part of the

regiments to Brigadier General Lewis, the camp commander. The First Indiana and the Third Minnesota figuratively changed themselves from infantry to naval reserve units by reason of the large lake which formed on the drill grounds and then extended its placid surface over portions of both regimental sites.

The Minnesota exchange was a mud splattered island, approached over causeways of pop bottle crates. The officers' baths and latrines were fifty feet distant from visible land. Two company streets were completely flooded and their occupants forced to move. In some places this lake was eighteen inches deep and it stayed there for three weeks.

With no changes of clothing, the men would plow through this mud—deep gumbo, which worked up into a doughlike substance in the unfloored tents—and then lie down in it to sleep, unless they were lucky enough to have cots. The dampness, the heat, the noxious mists, and ground vapors which covered man, horse, and equipment with moisture through the night, and the lack of changes of shoes and clothing spread general discomfort among the guardsmen, in spite of the fine spirit which they and their officers displayed in

their efforts to overcome the handicaps placed in their way.

IX

DIFFICULTY IN GETTING SUPPLIES

MANY of the men needed mosquito netting. The presence of dengue fever among the troops brought forth medical and official denials for three weeks and correspondents reporting affirmatively on the subject were publicly consigned to the Ananias class and threatened with expulsion from the camps, censorship, and other official hindrances.

Yet at the ends of three weeks the doctors admitted that there were cases of dengue fever in the camps and hospitals of some of the organizations, and General Parker sent the official warning up the valley that dengue was prevalent in the district, that it was epidemic at Brownsville. The men who had not been told through some newspaper reports were acquainted with the fact that the fever was communicated by mosquitoes, and, accordingly, orders were issued that all were to sleep under netting.

Everybody did—who had netting. But many

of the organizations did not have netting, and could not get it unless they purchased it from private funds, as some of the regiments finally did. In some places where "mosquito bar" was issued the men complained about using it on account of its ultra exclusiveness. It not only excluded the insects, but it excluded the air. It was not netting. It was cheesecloth.

The First Minnesota infantry lacked government issue cots and flooring for weeks, and purchased quantities of the former articles from private funds at the rate of $1.75 apiece. Cots, flooring and mosquito netting were the principal equipment needs of the New York division numbering 17,000. In a country where rain approached a cloudburst, floors and cots are most essential to health, and screening or cloth netting becomes almost a matter of life and death to protect the men from the hordes of tropical insects.

The government at first refused to honor the repeated requisitions for lumber. Later this inhumanity was rescinded, but not until the militiamen had spent thousands of dollars of their own to buy such necessities.

In the Iowa and Virginia brigades at Brownsville, before the issue of the government lumber,

squads and companies would pool funds to purchase lumber and construct the needed flooring. For weeks there were no wooden latrines in the Iowa camp, and oil in sufficient quantities to incinerate the pollution could not be obtained from the government, although Texas ranks among the greatest oil-producing states in the country. Colonel Bennett of the Third Iowa, a veteran commander who led his regiment through the Philippine campaigns, bravely put into words that which many another officer feared to breathe.

"The conditions under which this regiment has been ordered to go into camp are the worst that I have ever encountered in my twenty-five years' experience in the national guard and the federal service," Colonel Bennett told me.

From Staunton, Virginia, the birthplace of President Wilson, commander-in-chief of the army, came a machine gun company without mules to carry the machine guns, if there had been any. Popular subscription provided machine guns for one organization that was without this instrument which is necessary to modern warfare, and forced the war department to buy the machine guns lacking in other regiments. Popular subscription also provided moving soup kitch-

ens with which the soldiers could be fed on the march, after the fashion of the German, French, English, Russian, and Japanese armies. Private funds supplied numerous automobiles used in the government service.

For weeks these men in training took their food under almost the same conditions that it is consumed by men in the trenches. Squatting on the ground, in the dust or in the mud, the men ate from their mess kits while ponderous, slow-moving machinery at Washington tried to arrange for lumber appropriations. When the lumber was received for mess halls, kitchens, flooring, and latrines, all hands laid off drill for another long period while enough hammers or saws could be borrowed or privately bought or rented to erect buildings.

Open cesspools in the ground took the place of incinerators for weeks while the regiments waited for material to build this sanitary essential. When it rained, the crude containers, as well as the latrines, became flooded and carried pollution all over the camps. When it was windy, ashes and half-burned particles of refuse were spread about while odors of a crematory prevailed. When bricks were received for the incinerators,

cement was missing. Other regiments had bricks and cement, but no trowels.

Company B of the First Minnesota did not have enough blankets to go around. The second regiment from the same state was shy shelter halves. The Third regiment reached the border with an embarrassing deficiency of shirts and pants, I was told. I saw Virginia noncommissioned officers drilling, and some of them wore derby hats and stiff straw head gear. Some had leggings and some did not and some wore civilian shirts.

And Bryan's state—Nebraska. A month and a half after their arrival on the border the Fifth Nebraska infantry was still in need of shoes for the entire regiment.

The regiment had not received cots and was sleeping in the mud, as there were no floors. There were two companies without blankets, and the rest of the regiment, before leaving its state camp, had received a carload of gray cotton blankets.

Concerning blankets, on September 15 Governor Dunne of Illinois petitioned the war department to grant a furlough of ten days for the entire First and Second infantry regiments, then at Springfield, on the ground that the men were suf-

fering from the cold and did not have enough equipment to keep them warm.

But there were additional discomforts suffered by the Nebraska regiment, which arrived on the border on July 14. Until August 27 the men were without underwear with the exception of the single privately owned suit they had worn when they left their homes. On that day they received the first issue of undershirts, six hundred of which were size 45. Line officers of the organization told me that there were not 100 men in the regiment who could fit into a garment larger than size 40 and that the greater number needed 36's. Company B of the Fifth, coming from Bryan's home, Lincoln, Nebraska, arrived on the border lacking hats, shoes, pants, and leggings to the regulation amount.

Inadequate transportation only increased the difficulties of supplying the men. Three hundred miles of single track railroad is all that connects the lower Rio Grande valley with the rest of the country. Everything that reached the valley had to come over the single line of the St. Louis, Brownsville and Mexico. The men had to be fed; consequently rations got precedence over other supplies. The food shipments, together with reg-

ular shipping to and from the civilian population of the valley, almost required the entire facilities of the road.

Major General O'Ryan, commanding the New York division, told me one day that his quartermaster department had been able to get ahead of current needs by only four days' supplies.

X

REGULARS WERE PATIENT TUTORS

THE absence of prearranged plans in the border mobilization devolved the biggest burden upon the regular army staffs in the border districts, which were suddenly called upon to mother a hundred thousand comparatively inexperienced officers and men who were eager and willing to help themselves but, in view of their admitted amateurishness and handicaps of equipment, became largely dependent upon the regulars.

The regulars accomplished wonders under the circumstances. They, better than any one else, realized how ineffectual the results of their work seemed as compared with foreign demonstrations of a similar nature; they could appreciate the

deplorable absence of plan and prearranged facilities denied them by the administration. But it was their lot to make the best of it in silence, because a public complaint from an army officer is practically equivalent to his resignation.

I found but few and far isolated instances of the traditional regular army disesteem for the civilian soldiery. A spirit of farsighted hopefulness, helpfulness, friendliness marked the attitude of the regulars toward the militiamen. The regulars realized that here was the opportunity to teach the franchised soldiery of the nation the military needs of the nation. It was and is their belief that this knowledge would result in the application of widespread political pressure to bring about the much needed reform and extensions, so frequently recommended by the politically helpless regulars and as frequently ignored.

Regiment after regiment of regulars was stripped of officers who were detailed to advise, instruct, and train the militiamen. A regular army first lieutenant had for his class the officers of a regiment, including colonel, lieutenant-colonel, and three majors. A captain was assigned to impart technical knowledge to a brigade, especially the militia brigadier. Regular noncommissioned

officers spent days and weeks in the camps, teaching cooks, horseshoers, bakers, farriers, lieutenants, and captains. At Fort Ringgold, near Rio Grande City, where there was a force of 1,500 men, only twelve regular officers remained, including the post commander. At Fort Brown some companies of the Fourth United States infantry had but one instead of three commissioned officers.

It was the duty of these detailed regulars to direct the footsteps of the militia and act in the difficult capacity of adviser to the untrained commanders of the guard units. They also conducted the one hour a day school in Spanish for officers and assisted the troop commanders and the supply department in solving the farcical mysteries of the requisition formulae, by which a week's mathematical computation and reams of documentation are necessary before a size seven shoe can be changed for a pair of elevens. This red tape was the despair of the militia, and the business men in the guard who encountered this system marveled at its indirectness.

The absence of blank forms frequently impeded this work for days. Certain needed things could not be asked for because the regulation application blank or requisition blank needed in that spe-

cial case was not to be had. I knew of cases where guardsmen whose enlistment had expired could not get their final discharges because there were no proper forms on which the final papers could be drawn. This trouble extended to the pay rolls, the muster blanks, the transportation vouchers, the medical reports.

Where the men criticized conditions under which they were forced to live, many of their officers characterized the complainants as "kickers and soreheads." The men were receiving only $15 a month, which was far below their civilian wage, and maybe, in the absence of action, this had something to do with their kicks. But a large percentage of the militia officers receiving regular army pay, were getting more money than they ever earned in civilian life, and consequently found less reason for dissatisfaction.

Another number of official condemnations of criticism of the service, the conditions, the equipment, can be rightly attributed to pure ignorance. Such officers thought the conditions were good because they did not know what good military conditions are; their opportunities of learning had been limited. Other officers were stimulated to denounce criticism, in the mistaken belief that the

criticism had been directed at them personally. The regular army has been made the "goat" so frequently in "investigations" that it subconsciously assumes the defensive whenever criticism is in the air.

XI

FIELD HOSPITALS

As usual, the care of the sick came in for much censure, but here again it was evident that the medical officers, although stoutly defending their conduct of affairs, were sorely handicapped by the paucity of premobilization plans for taking care of the sick and wounded. It is not to be wondered that in a profession where humanity is so professedly the prime stimulus, the medical and surgical profession would make generous response to the needs of the army. Militiamen while in the service undoubtedly received medical and surgical attention which would have cost thousands to civilian patients capable of paying the bill.

In army life the medicos are in the happy position of a disbursing agent who is his own auditor. They lay the rules for the sanitation of the camp. They care for the sick and then care for the sta-

tistics which show how numerous the sick are. These statistics show in turn how good the sanitation has been, and altogether it all proves that the medical service is excellent.

It is not my intention to intimate that the army doctors would take advantage of the opportunity to make out their own scores, but that they are unwilling to submit to an outside audit is undeniable. Obstacles were put in my way when I tried to investigate conditions. Cases of illness were hidden from me. Furthermore, the report of Dr. Darlington was suppressed in the War Department.

Hospital conditions on the border upon the arrival of the militia were admittedly bad. The admission has come in the form of extensive reforms and corrections of severely criticized conditions which were stoutly defended at first, but which gave way finally when criticism would not be browbeaten.

At McAllen, sick men of the New York division lay on the ground in open, unfloored tents and the ground was muddy. The only hospital at hand was a field hospital and in its operation there came a clash of theory and practice. Theory remained uppermost for weeks, to the great discom-

fort and pain of patients, but practice finally won.

The theory of a field hospital is that it should have no cots or flooring or screening, because, theoretically, patients would not remain in the hospital long enough to get the advantage of these comforts. The field hospital is hardly more than a first aid station immediately back of the firing line, where the wounded are assembled for shipment back to the next unit, which is called an evacuation hospital, at which place there is another sorting and the hopelessly ineffective fighters are sent on back to the base hospital. The field hospital must be mobile so that it can move forward or backward with the tide of battle. Extra equipment would impede it.

But there being no other hospitals in which the New York sick could be cared for, the field hospital in reality became an evacuation or base hospital, but in theory and according to regulations it remained a field hospital unit.

There was no other hospital at hand and the men had to be taken care of in the field hospital. So while strict field hospital regulations were followed, the canvas shelter performed the function of a base hospital. One day in the early part of July and right after a rain which left McAllen

in a sea of mud, I saw sixty sick men lying on the damp ground in this hospital, while a four-inch ridge of earth held back the water from them. Another man, suffering from pneumonia, had been unconscious for four days; he was lying on a canvas stretcher on the ground.

Opposite these rows of men on the ground were the tents of the officers, floored, screened, and equipped with cots. Since that time the hospital has been changed. Floors were placed, cots provided, and the sides of the tents inclosed in wire screening. Now another base hospital composed of a number of wooden pavilions is being erected at McAllen at a cost of $25,000. This new institution grew out of complaints which New York patients made over their treatment in the other base hospital at Brownsville. But the New York improvement was without diet kitchens for the feeding of convalescents who were in need of such consideration before being returned to the coarse army ration.

Some of the men forwarded to that base hospital at Brownsville deserted the institution. Among those who were able there were frequent instances where they got away and reported back to their regiments that they would rather stand court

martial for desertion than undergo treatment or operation at the Brownsville base hospital.

I recall one corporal of the First Oklahoma infantry who was sent to Brownsville for a minor operation. The man had been a hospital ward steward in the navy. He told me that what he saw at the Brownsville hospital caused him to absent himself without leave on the day of his arrival and return to his regiment, where I saw him, a secret patient in another field hospital which was not supposed to be taking care of such cases.

The Brownsville hospital is composed of six wooden pavilions and auxiliary buildings, very much like chicken coops, which had required six weeks to build. The delays were caused by the difficulties in getting lumber, labor, screen, and supplies. I went through it the day it was pronounced ready for occupancy.

The water connections were not in; the operating room had not been built; the kitchens were not finished; the ground had not been broken for either the baths or the administration building; the nurses' quarters were still in the brush, and there was no laundry. But cots were being installed and that night the train from up the valley brought in two carloads of sick from the up-river

camps, the ambulances backed up to the platform, the sick were loaded on and taken out to the "hospital."

For this the medicos are not to blame, but the commander-in-chief of the army who sent 30,000 men to live in a fever hole without preparing hospital facilities is.

Before the occupancy of the new hospital, the Brownsville "cases" were handled in an old Civil War ruin on the Fort Brown reservation. This building was erected several years after the war of the rebellion and had long since passed its usefulness.

At the opening of the border troubles three years ago, the building was reoccupied by the army, and sick and well alike had been living in it since. Two troops of cavalry used the interior for a barracks, while the sick were allowed to lie in cots on the veranda. This veranda was unscreened and the militiamen who began to arrive in July were without mosquito netting, as the regulars had been before them.

XII

DELAY IN GRANTING DISCHARGES

If the sick had many things to contend with, the well men had other problems almost as discouraging. One of the greatest of these was the problem of getting discharged.

The men began to feel that the cause for which they had enlisted—namely: the active defense of the nation's border or the invasion of Mexico—existed no longer. Thousands of these men, who had given up homes, families, and positions, all to take their place in their regiments if they belonged to the guard, or to enlist if they were not members, began to feel as the days dragged into weeks and the weeks into months with no military action to break the monotony, that they had been cheated, duped, shanghaied into a proposition where they lost their accustomed work and civilian salary and gained a day laborer's job at a military pittance.

When it appeared that there had been no necessity for the mobilization, that either the danger had not existed at all or did not continue to exist, that nothing was being accomplished by the

continued presence of the militia on the border, employers who had agreed to pay their employes in government service began to get the same feelings as their employes; they began to feel that they had been and were cheated, duped, exploited.

Congress passed a poorly defined act by which militiamen with dependents, if they knew the formula, could make application for discharge. Immediately employes who possessed the expressed qualifications of the act began receiving letters from their employers, urging them to get their discharges and return to work or their salaries, which had been going to their wives and children, would stop. There was a stampede for discharges. It is not to be denied that guardsmen with dependents were considered fortunate by their irresponsible comrades, and it must be admitted that many forgotten sisters and cousins and aunts and relatives or distant connections suddenly found young guardsmen eager to contribute to their support.

But the overwhelming majority of the cases were bona fide, and the condition of many wives and children and aged parents suddenly deprived of support from fathers, husbands, and sons was deplorable.

Employers couldn't understand why their employes who were in the guard and who had dependents didn't take advantage of the immunity offered by congress, return home to the care of their loved ones, and relieve their employers of the financial drain, which had by that time begun to lose its patriotic aspect. The reason was that the guardsmen couldn't get the discharges; that their efforts were opposed; that many obstacles were put in their way to prevent them from leaving the ranks. The opposition, sometimes passive, sometimes active, came from the commanders, most of whom would have found their commands much reduced if all of the applications for discharges were acted upon, or were acting upon instructions from Washington.

The fact remains that almost everybody wanted to go home. As I was boarding a train in Brownsville several weeks ago, I was approached by a young guardsman, who hurriedly told me his case, thrust into my hands a number of copies of letters between himself, his wife, and his employers, and said: "Explain to the employers back home that we want to get out but can't. They don't understand why we can't get out and neither do we, but the fact is that we can't. My employer is threat-

ening to cut off my salary unless I return, and I have a wife and baby back home. I'll be in an awful fix if the salary doesn't continue."

I found obstruction after obstruction was put in the way of the men who wished to return to the care of their families, almost regardless of the extremity of the circumstances. A man who was suffering the mental anguish that comes with the knowledge of loved ones unprovided for was made to feel that he was a "quitter" and a "slacker" if he made application for discharge.

Commanding officers addressed their men on this subject and heaped anathema upon those who might have in their hearts the primitive and justly selfish feeling of responsibility toward their families.

If the determined militiaman, with will power and courage sufficient to overcome these intimidations, did decide to ask for his discharge, he encountered a new stumbling block—official ignorance, either real or professed. He was told that the application had to be made in "due form," but what that consisted of was a mystery. He was told that he had to have affidavits from relatives and friends, and papers signed, countersigned and witnessed. There were no blanks for the pur-

pose, the officers didn't know whether any had ever been prepared; the orders had been delayed. The matter would be looked up.

And so, for some of the men, the weeks dragged by, with every mail bringing appeals concerning the need of shoes, the butcher's bill, the doctor's bill, the increase in the price of baby's milk—and the empty purse. In the meantime the would-be applicant for discharge was being subjected to all manner of humiliation.

It is difficult to get the figures on how many desertions there were, but I know of five from one Illinois regiment. Every fifty miles of the way from Brownsville toward San Antonio provost details searched all the trains and placed under arrest all guardsmen unable to show official permission for their movement. Many officers unable to obtain furloughs resigned and some for other reasons.

All over the country funds started for the relief of the militia dependents. The Red Cross took up the work. In Chicago this organization had, by the end of September, expended about $50,000 in administering relief to some 600 dependent families, which received from $5 to $50 a month. Aside from these sums, chambers of com-

merce and city organizations in small towns and large cities endeavored to meet the worthy demand by subscription, and further still, many regimental officers held lists of regimental "uncles," military enthusiasts, wealthy former members of the organizations, all of whom were called upon to contribute to the support of families for the honor of the regiment so that the ranks of the organization would not be decimated by the stalking figure of want.

But their work, patriotic and wide-spread, has not sufficed. In thousands of rented rooms, little houses and small flats, tragedies are being enacted as bitter to the sufferers as the tragedies of unavoidable war—and they are caused by the selfishness and caprices of politics.

Have I overlooked what was done for what was not done? Have I been scant in praise of what was done right? Have I been tactlessly remiss with congratulations and brutally frank with cold observations? I have.

In another series, if the editor permits, I will present the pleasing side of the picture. Quartermaster Aloe, working far into the night, every night; Captain McCoy doing a general officer's work with captain's rank and pay; militia officers,

business leaders, struggling with the atrocious accounting system, although every one of them could have installed an infinitely better one if permitted by officialdom; the courage of other business men, wielding ax and spade in the frightful heat, digging ditches, building picket lines, and doing other labor they should not have been called upon to do. And General Parker, medal of honor hero, who in the face of all obstacles, lack of modern equipment, and government indifference, has kept his cavalry on a par with Russia's, working night and day to bring order out of the chaos thrust upon him.

But first must be set out the wrongfulness of the civilian head of the army compelling the mobilization of troops in the field contrary to world-wide lessons fully learned by soldiers.

In this instance it has led only to unparalleled discomfort, not a little tragedy and some avoidable deaths. If it should occur again in the face of a competent enemy it might lead to national destruction.